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M E S S A G E

OF THE

MAYORALTY

TO THE

COMMON COUNCIL

OF THE

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS.

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OCTOBER, 1853.

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NEW ORLEANS:

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1853.

MAYOR

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CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

OCTOBER 1892

# MAYORALTY OF NEW ORLEANS,

OCTOBER 18th, 1853.

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To the Honorable President and Members of the Common Council of the  
City of New Orleans.

GENTLEMEN:—After a recess of several weeks, both branches of the Common Council meet to-day for the transaction of business. It affords me heartfelt pleasure to greet you on this occasion under more favorable auspices than was the case at the period of your adjournment. The fatal epidemic which had then commenced its ravages has since run its course, and I am happy to say that the city is now restored to its wonted health, the announcement to that effect having been made officially by the Board a few days since.

Adverting very briefly to the incidents connected with the rise and progress of the cruel disease which afflicted us during the past summer, I will state that the Board of Health, created by virtue of ordinance No. 1145 of the Common Council, was organized on the 26th July, and continued in permanent session during the prevalence of the epidemic. Every member of that body was actuated by an honest desire to do everything in his power to mitigate the evils of that dire calamity, and for the faithful discharge of duties self-imposed and disinterested, and performed, moreover, under the most arduous circumstances. The Board of Health is entitled to the grateful remembrance of the community. Immediately after the organization of the Board, it was deemed necessary in view of the constantly increasing number of sick, to establish infirmaries in the respective Districts of the city, a step attended with the happiest results, for, without these, the ravages of the disease would unquestionably have been greater. It was deemed requisite also to establish orphan asylums for the reception of the large number of children thrown helpless on the world by the death of their parents and relatives; and in this way no less than two hundred and fifty orphans were taken charge of at the expense of the city.



In all of these steps the efforts of the Board were auxiliary to the active, searching and unremitting benevolence of the Howard Association. Commencing its operations, as this institution did, prior to the establishment of the Board of Health, the latter found a portion of their labors already anticipated, and after entering upon their functions both bodies acted in harmonious conjunction, and continued during the prevalence of the epidemic to direct their energies to the relief of the destitute sick.

Of the Howard Association, and of human and undaunted bearing of the members composing that noble band of gentlemen, I feel inadequate to speak in becoming terms. But I should be insensible to the obligations of gratitude were I to fail in acknowledging thus publicly their untiring devotion, their generous zeal, and their disinterested efforts during the late epidemic. Unwearying and unflagging in their exertions, the influence of the Association was felt throughout the length and breadth of the city. Poverty and want disappeared beneath their well-directed energies, and the disease became stripped of half its terrors from the knowledge that in the hour of necessity no member of that heroic society would be appealed to in vain.

In offering this feeble testimonial to the signal merits and services of the Association, I must be permitted to add that their endeavors were warmly seconded by every citizen. In the midst of the great distress, every one obeyed with alacrity the call of suffering humanity, and contributed his share towards the mitigation of the general evil. And it may safely be asserted that under equally trying circumstances no community displayed a greater degree of fortitude, and a more cool, resolute and cheerful courage. Even when the mortality reached a point that might have well appalled the stoutest heart, there was no faltering and no despondency; and though the countenance of every citizen reflected the gloom from without, there was not even the semblance of a panic. This much it may be due to say, in justice to the reputation of our city, which, at a period when no one should have exaggerated the horrors of a fearful calamity, was assailed abroad in a wanton and unprovoked manner. I am happy, however, to say, that this was the exception only, and not the rule, and I should not have alluded to the subject, were it not thus formally and officially to correct the impression that may still prevail in some quarters, that even during the period of the greatest mortality the rites of sepulture were not performed with due decorum and decency.

In the midst of so much desolation and misery, endangered by the visitation of the pestilence, the citizens of New Orleans were comforted by the kindness of feeling which her suffering condition elicited in every portion of

our country. If the inscrutable will of Providence laid the heavy hand of affliction on us, so also, was it the means of exhibiting to the world a genuine display of charity such as has rarely or ever been equaled. The North and the South, the East and the West, vied with each other in sending us practical aid and assistance. Collections for the suffering and destitute sick were made in every part of the wide Union, and a universality of sympathy and generous emotion was awakened in our behalf, which went far towards consoling us in the hour of our darkest need. For this unbounded liberality we offer our heartfelt thanks, nor shall I seek for terms to express what no language can convey, the deep sense of obligation which every member of this community feels for the munificent succor so freely and cordially given. To the present generation and the recipients of this noble generosity, the theme can never weary; and in after times, when the history of the epidemic of 1853 shall have become dim, its sufferings forgotten, and the human gap replenished by the incessant inroads of an active and energetic population, that one incident of the dire visitation must forever remain engraven on the memory of a grateful people, and will stand forth as one of the brightest and most enduring monuments of charity that the world has ever witnessed.

The advent of the yellow fever after six years of uninterrupted good health, coupled with the extreme malignity of the disease and its appearance in the most fatal form, in localities that have always been deemed exempt from the malady, have led many to embrace the theory that the late epidemic was not of domestic origin, but imported. This belief has induced very many of our fellow citizens to advocate the establishment of a permanent and rigid quarantine, as the only measure calculated to afford security for the future. And it is argued, moreover, that even if quarantine laws should be found not only an expensive protection, but also an abstrusion to free commercial intercourse, embarrassing to trade, and ineffectual perhaps in securing the end for which they are established, that the experience of the past two months having proved the transmissibility of the disease to points where the fever never before prevailed, we owe it less to ourselves than to those doing business with us in the interior, and with whom our intercourse is of the most constant and intimate character, to adopt such steps as will allay the panic and alarm engendered in their minds by the ravages of the cruel malady, and thus afford to them the impression of future security and exemption.

It is contended, on the other hand, that the fever being of local origin, quarantine regulations are useless and cumbersome; that the experience of other places favorable to the development of the disease has condemned this protection as utterly inefficacious; that the alleged importation of the



malady this year cannot be substantiated by facts, and that we should not, for the gratification of a mere popular prejudice at home, or with the view of allaying a misguided excitement abroad, fasten upon ourselves a costly and superfluous yoke.

On ground so debatable, honest and candid minds may well afford to differ. Opinions maintained with much plausibility, and a strong show of argument on both sides, are not readily reconciled to the adoption of a system in opposition to their preconceived views: It became important, therefore, that a minute and searching investigation be made of the causes and origin of the late epidemic, that a complete history of the same be presented to the world, and that all possible information be elicited in connection therewith, for the purpose of establishing conclusively the value of quarantine regulation, so far as yellow fever is concerned. Entertaining these opinions, the Board of Health, in the discharge of the responsible duties delegated to them, have recently appointed a sanitary commission, composed of eminent medical gentlemen, who have been in daily session for some time past, and are now actively engaged in prosecuting their researches into the rise, origin and progress of the late fever. In due course of time the result of their observations will be laid before your honorable body, and it is to be hoped that the light thrown on the subject may enable all parties to determine the question dispassionately.

Individually, I am of the opinion that quarantine, under proper regulations, would be to the interest and benefit of the city; and if it is to be eschewed, the strongest and most conclusive evidence must be arrayed against its establishment, not merely in consideration of ourselves, but in justice also to the majority of persons abroad, who are fully impressed with the efficacy and security of that protection.

I take this opportunity of urging upon your honorable body my previous recommendation in favor of changing the present system of cleaning the streets, with the view of having this important branch of the public service performed in a more satisfactory and creditable manner. This measure is so intimately connected with our hygienic condition, that I trust to be excused for again adverting to the necessity, on the part of the Common Council, of applying the most rigid rules and regulations to the execution of the work.

I shall be most happy to co-operate with you in any measure having for its object an improved system of drainage, on the basis previously recommended; and in asking your honorable body to take this matter into early consideration, I am not unmindful that it must necessarily be attended with great expense, and that in our present situation we owe it both to the honor

and interest of the city, to practice the most rigid economy. But without being derelict in the management of the means confided to our trust, I am of opinion that the Common Council should endeavor to elicit all the information bearing upon this most vital question, with the view of ascertaining whether it may not eventually prove a saving, as it unquestionably will be a vast improvement, to reclaim the swamp in the rear, and effect the drainage of the city directly into the waters of the lake.

I have to add, in conclusion, that my views in relation to the establishment of an alms house have undergone no change, and I trust that as the necessity of such an institution is daily becoming more apparent, the Common Council will take early steps to create an asylum of this kind.

I am not prepared at this moment to recommend any further improvement, as the state of our finances will not admit of any expenditure but what is absolutely necessary to the welfare of the city.

I have the honor to be,

With great respect,

Your obedient servant,

A. D. CROSSMAN, Mayor.